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RAMPART CANYON POWER SITE LANDS IN ALASKA CLASSIFIED

Power site classification of nearly 9 million acres of public lands in Alaska along the Yukon River at the site of the proposed Rampart Canyon Project was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall.

The Department's action followed more than a year of study, including consideration of views expressed at public hearings held at Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Fort Yukon, Alaska, and at Washington, D. C.

"Classification as a power site implies no judgment by the Department on the merits of the proposed Rampart Canyon power project," Secretary Udall emphasized. He said investigation of the engineering and economic feasibility of the proposed hydroelectric project, now under way as a cooperative study of the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Army, should be completed in time to allow submission of a report to Congress soon. Fish and wildlife aspects of the proposed project are included in the study. The Regional Directors of the two Bureaus of the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a report on the project in April 1964. The data from this report will be incorporated in the forthcoming report on Interior's study of the project.

The Rampart Canyon project would harness the Yukon River near Rampart, Alaska, forming a 10,500 square-mile lake, slightly larger than Lake Erie. The project would have a rated capacity of 4.7 million kilowatts of power, according to estimates of the Corps of Engineers.

In 1960, the Corps of Engineers submitted a recommendation to the Interior Department's Geological Survey that public lands required for the project be classified as potentially valuable for power purposes pending completion of a feasibility survey and subsequent action on the proposed project. In January of 1962, the Geological Survey requested the classification, which was then noted on the public land tract books at Fairbanks, Alaska.

Power site classifications are usual in such cases, the Secretary stated, to control acquisition or use of the public lends involved while project proposals are being studied.

The Department said the classification does not affect valid existing rights or prevent future mining claims, mineral leases or nonmineral entries, except that nonmineral entries can be made only after determination by the Federal Power Commission that power site values would not be injured. All future claims, leases and entries will be subject to a reservation by the Government for possible power site use. Resources management continues under the Bureau of Land Management.

Spokesmen for native interests, seeking resolution of the native claim situation in all parts of Alaska, had objected to the classification unless native claims to the area were first settled. The Department said it did not regard the matter as reason for delaying protection of the area for power site purposes, since nothing in the classification affects valid existing rights nor prevents future recognition of claims by Congressional action.

The Department stated that the classification will not affect the rate of payment by the State of Alaska toward Federal-aid highway construction. The public lands in the classification will continue to be reported as "public domain" to the Department of Commerce for purposes of computing the Federal share of the cost of Federal-sid projects.

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